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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 10, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR

MR. McGEORGE BUNDY

For your information.

Arthur Schlesinger, jr.
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File
Cuba

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Cuba: Political, Diplomatic and
Economic Problems

1. Introduction. The operational planning for the Cuban project seems much farther advanced than the political, diplomatic and economic planning which properly should accompany it. As a result, preparations to deal with the political, diplomatic and economic repercussions of the operation are inadequate. Unless we speed these preparations, we run the risk that a successful military result may be to a considerable degree nullified by seriously adverse results in the political, diplomatic and economic areas.
2. What is at stake. In the days since January 20, your administration has changed the face of American foreign policy. The soberness of style, the absence of cold war cliches, the lack of self-righteousness and sermonizing, the impressive combination of reasonableness and firmness, the generosity to new ideas, the dedication to social progress, the tough-minded idealism of purpose -- all these factors have transformed (to use that repellent word) the 'image' of the United States before the world. The result has been to go far toward restoring confidence in the intelligence, maturity and restraint of American leadership. People around the world have forgotten the muddling and moralizing conservatism of the Eisenhower period with surprising speed. The United States is emerging again as a great, mature and liberal nation, coolly and intelligently dedicated to the job of stopping Communism, strengthening the free and neutral nations and working for peace. It is this reawakening world faith in America which is at stake in the Cuban operation.
3. U.S. vulnerabilities. I do not mean to suggest that the use of force to protect a reasonable national security interest would necessarily have an adverse effect on the world per se. If force is used efficiently and effectively, and if the threat to national security is demonstrable

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and convincing, the controlled use of force for limited objectives might well enhance respect for the United States. To define these conditions, however, calls immediate attention to one of our main vulnerabilities in the Cuban affair. In the first place, however 'Cuban' the operation will seem to be, the U. S. will be held accountable for it before the bar of world opinion; our own press has seen to that. Beyond this, there is an obstinate fact: A great many people simply do not at this moment see that Cuba presents so grave and compelling a threat to our national security as to justify a course of action which much of the world will interpret as calculated aggression against a small nation in defiance both of treaty obligations and of the international standards we have repeatedly asserted against the Communist world. It is only necessary to remark that the people who fail to understand the pressing necessity for this action include the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (and that he has said that the only members of his Committee whom he thinks would support the action are Senators Dodd and Lausche -- which perhaps suggests the kind of people to whom the idea will automatically appeal).

4. In short, many people in the United States and probably most people outside the United States will -- unless countermeasures are put into immediate play -- see a vast gap between what they regard as the minor threat presented by a tiny nation of 7 million to the great United States and the massive response (i. e., the instigation of civil war and the overthrow of the government) proposed by the United States. To say that the Russians are doing worse in Laos is true but irrelevant, since we profess to be acting according to higher motives and higher principles than the Russians. Because the alleged threat to our national security will not seem to many people great enough to justify so flagrant a violation of our professed principles, these people will assume that our action is provoked by a threat to something other than our security. Given the mythology of our relationship to Latin America, they will assume that we are acting, not to protect our safety, but to protect our property and investments. In short, for many people the easiest explanation of our action will be as a reversion to economic imperialism of the pre-World War I, Platt-Amendment, big-stick, gunboat-diplomacy kind.

It need hardly be said that the apparent revival of these strains in American foreign policy -- and especially their revival in connection

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with the most dramatic foreign policy initiative of the new administration -- will jeopardize the new 'image' of the United States and will threaten to wipe out the great gains of the last two and a half months.

5. How the USSR will exploit the situation. We can consider the measures necessary to prevent this outcome better if we first speculate about the Communist reaction to a landing in Cuba.

The first Communist effort will be to nail down the already existing impression that such a landing is sponsored by the U.S. In doing this, the Communists have already had the indispensable assistance of the American press. They will be able to make their case almost entirely by quotations from U.S. sources. No matter how ostensibly 'Cuban' the operation in fact is in personnel and in equipment, most of the world -- our friends as well as our foes -- will assume (on the basis of American press reports) that it is American in its conception and in its preparation.

If the landing succeeds in setting off uprisings behind the line and in stimulating defections from Castro's militia, and if the regime collapses with reasonable speed, then the political damage will be minimized. But if it settles down to a protracted conflict, then we can be certain that the world Communist agitprop apparatus will swing into full and vigorous action.

6. The Communists will be able to count, first, on a generalized sympathy for the underdog against the bully, for David against Goliath -- as in such past cases as the Boers vs. Britain or Finland vs. the USSR. Even some of our friends will derive a certain satisfaction from watching Castro defy the great United States.

The Communists will next seek to use the alleged U.S. initiative to bolster the Marxist interpretation of history. They will portray it as an effort on the part of the greatest capitalist nation to punish a small country for its desire to achieve political and economic independence. Throughout the underdeveloped world, they will try to persuade local nationalists to identify Castro's cause with their own struggles. There will be particular emphasis (already visible in official Cuban propaganda) on Castro as the defender of the colored races against white imperialism.

The first stage in this will be the fomenting of riots and demonstrations. American Embassies will be attacked and American diplomats (and other American personnel) mobbed. The underdeveloped countries will be urged in the United Nations to defend their own future freedom of action by defending Castro; we can expect to be placed on the defensive in the U. N. for some time and to be subjected to a series of harassing debates and resolutions. Ex-colonial nations everywhere will be called on to identify their own problems with those of Castro.

Nor will Soviet agitational operations be confined to Asia, Africa and Latin America (though they will probably be most profitable there). The assault against Castro will add fuel to the fires of anti-Americanism throughout Europe. It will be the latest scandal of St. Germain des Pres (Sartre of course hailed Castro's Cuba; even Raymond Aron's recent series of pieces after his Cuban visit, published in Figaro in February, were relatively measured and would not lead people to think that drastic action against Castro was necessary to save the west). The people who have been crowding Trafalgar Square to protest the bomb will be crowding it again to shout for Castro and denounce the U. S. as the last stronghold of imperialism.

We can doubtless weather the public opinion storm. The second stage will be operational. Funds will be collected for Castro around the world. No Russian troops need be sent to Cuba; but volunteers will quickly appear from Western Europe, from Asia and especially from Africa, organized in Jose Marti Brigades and even probably in Abraham Lincoln Brigades. U. S. efforts to intercept shiploads of such volunteers will heap further coals on the anti-American conflagration. One ship sunk, and there will be new mobs, new demonstrations, new riots and new brigades.

The model for this operation, of course, will be the Spanish Civil War; but the added dimension of imperialism vs. nationalism will mean that the whole thing is even more made to order for Soviet exploitation. The objective will be to portray the Soviet Union as the patron and protector of nationalists, Negroes, new nations and peace and to portray the Kennedy Administration as a gang of capitalist imperialists maddened by the loss of profits and driven to aggression and war. If this stratagem is permitted to succeed, it will abolish all the progress we have made in recent months to win the confidence of the new nations. Even political

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leaders in other lands who understand our problem and sympathize with our objective will hardly be able to ignore the surge of public anger in their own countries.

7. Countermeasures to nullify the Communist offensive. Our problem is how to protect the post-January 20 impression of the United States as a mature and liberal nation, opposed to imperialism and colonialism and dedicated to justice, peace and freedom.

The operational contribution to this effort -- i. e., Cubanizing the operation and doing nothing which would be inconsistent with a spontaneous Cuban effort -- has been worked out with skill and care. But the supporting political and diplomatic measures seem still in a highly rudimentary stage.

8. The United States line. The impending Stevenson speech in the United Nations represents our first effort at a political-diplomatic counter-offensive. The essential elements of this speech are (a) that Castro is threatened, not by Americans, but by Cubans justly indignant over his betrayal of his own revolution, (b) that we sympathize with these patriotic Cubans, and (c) that there will be no American participation in any military aggression against Castro's Cuba. If our representatives cannot evade in debate the question whether the CIA has actually helped the Cuban rebels, they will presumably be obliged, in the traditional, pre-U-2 manner, to deny any such CIA activity. (If Castro flies a group of captured Cubans to New York to testify that they were organized and trained by CIA, we will have to be prepared to show that the alleged CIA personnel were errant idealists or soldiers-of-fortune working on their own.)

If this -- or something like it -- is the general line we are prepared to take and stick to, then the State Department should prepare a definitive statement of this position.

That statement should be communicated first to the information officers of our government likely to be confronted with questions about the Cuban operation -- Salinger, Murrow, Tubby, White, Sylvester. A meeting of these officers should be convened in the next few days.

At an appropriate moment, the statement should be communicated to United States Ambassadors, and especially to those in the new nations.

What about the Senate Foreign Relations Committee? What about the House Foreign Affairs Committee? What about Senators and Congressmen in general? Someone should begin to think what they should be told.

A Committee for a Free Cuba should be organized with impressive liberal names to backstop the Revolutionary Council and offset the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

9. Diversionsary measures. Some thought should be given to possible diversionsary measures which might offset the Soviet propaganda offensive. The arrest of Masferrer was a good stroke. Could not something be done against the Dominican Republic in the next few days? -- some new call for action against the Trujillo tyranny? Can we not affirm in some striking way our support for some progressive government in Latin America, like Venezuela? Can we not do something in Africa or Asia which will counteract the Soviet claim that we are unregenerate imperialists? Could something be brought before the United Nations in the next ten days which would permit us to take a strong anti-imperialist position?

10. Protection of the President. The character and repute of President Kennedy constitute one of our greatest national resources. Nothing should be done to jeopardize this invaluable asset. When lies must be told, they should be told by subordinate officials. At no point should the President be asked to lend himself to the cover operation. For this reason, there seems to me merit in Secretary Rusk's suggestion that someone other than the President make the final decision and do so in his absence -- someone whose head can later be placed in the block if things go terribly wrong.

Someone should start thinking about press conferences.

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us about the reported invasion of Cuba this morning?

A. We are doing our best to get the exact facts. So far as I can tell at present, a number of opponents of the Castro regime have landed on Cuba. I understand that the Revolutionary Council is trying to make contact with these people.

Q. Sir, according to the newspapers, the rebel forces were trained in American camps and supplied by American agencies.

A. There have been many thousands of Cuban refugees in Florida in these last months. I have no doubt that many of them have been determined to do what they can at the earliest possible moment to restore freedom to their homeland. They have the sympathy of American citizens in this effort -- just as the forces of Castro enjoyed similar sympathy three years ago when they were conducting their rebellion against Batista. I suppose that, just as the Castro forces got money and arms from sources in the United States, these new rebels may well have too. But, so far as I can tell, this is a purely Cuban operation. I doubt whether Cuban patriots in exile would have to be stimulated and organized by the United States in order to persuade them to liberate their nation from a Communist dictator.

Q. Mr. President, have you any plans for the recognition of the Revolutionary Council as a provisional government?

A. None at this time.

Q. Mr. President, is CIA involved in this affair?

A. As I said a moment ago, I imagine that elements in the United States helped these opponents of Castro, as they helped Castro himself in 1958. I can assure you that the United States Government has no intention of using force to overthrow the Castro regime or of contributing force for that purpose unless compelled to do so in the interests of self-defense. [Hardly satisfactory: it is imperative that a better formula be worked out before your next press conference.]

Q. Mr. President, would you say that, so far as Cuba is concerned, the U. S. has been faithful to its treaty pledges against intervention in other countries? Would you say that it has resolutely enforced the laws forbidding the use of U. S. territory to prepare revolutionary action against another state?

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11. Protection against involvement. A great danger is that U.S. prestige will become committed to the success of the rebellion; that, if the rebellion appears to be failing, the rebels will call for U.S. armed help; that members of Congress will take up the cry; and that pressures will build up which will make it politically hard to resist the demand to send in the Marines. If we do this, then our intervention will become blatant and obvious and the political consequences almost irreparable. We will have presented the Soviet Union with an American Hungary.

The first protection against step-by-step involvement is to convince the Cuban leaders that in no foreseeable circumstances will we send in U.S. troops. U.S. prestige will not be publicly committed to the success of the operation until we recognize a provisional government; so we must tell the Revolutionary Council that it cannot expect immediate U.S. recognition; that recognition will only come when they have a better than 50-50 chance of winning under their own steam; that this is a fight which Cubans will have in essence to win for themselves. These points must be made clearly and emphatically; my present impression is that the exiles expect recognition as soon as they land in Cuba.

When senatorial voices are raised demanding overt U.S. intervention, our people must be primed to oppose this demand.

12. Support of Free Cuba. If this operation should succeed, the United States will acquire full responsibility for post-Castro Cuba. The eyes of the world will be fixed on Cuba, as they were never fixed, for example, on post-Communist Guatemala. We simply will not be able to afford another Castillo Armas. If the post-Castro regime begins by devoting its first attention to owners of expropriated properties and to foreign investors; if it kicks the ordinary people off the beaches and out of the hotels; if it tries to turn back the social and economic clock -- such things would triumphantly document the Soviet contention that the American motive in overthrowing Castro was to make Cuba safe again for American capitalism.

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I personally do not have great confidence in the competence of the Revolutionary Council. Their statements and manifestos do not up to this point exhibit much realistic understanding of the social and economic problems they would encounter in post-Castro Cuba. Their approach seems essentially legalistic; they are thinking in terms of the assurance of liberties to the professional and business classes. They have done very little to reassure the lower classes that the social and economic gains of the Castro period will not be reversed.

If we are not going to be cursed throughout the underdeveloped world as unregenerate imperialists, post-Castro Cuba will have to be at least as progressive as Betancourt's Venezuela. The Revolutionary Council must be made to understand this. Above all, we must begin thinking very quickly of a man sufficiently astute, aggressive and influential to go to Habana as U.S. Ambassador and make sure that the new regime gets off on a socially progressive track.

13. Emergency economic program. The civil conflict will probably create much disorganization and havoc. The exact economic state of post-Castro Cuba cannot, of course, be predicted. But economists somewhere should be at work on a series of relief and reconstruction programs pegged at various levels of need; and someone should be checking the immediate availability of the commodities necessary to meet the requirements. Someone else should be drafting the necessary legislation. We ought to have a look at these things in the next week or so.

In addition, another group of economists should be working on a long-range development plan for Cuba to serve as a guide for the post-Castro government. The main sketch for such a plan should be ready by May 1.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

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